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Solon J. Buck.

Clarence Walworth Alvord, Historian with a bibliog'y of published works (1928)

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

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Clarence Walworth Alvord Historian

WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF HIS PUBLISHED WORKS

BY SOLON J. BUCK

University of Minnesota



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CLARENCE WALWORTH ALVORD, HISTORIAN

By Solon J. Buck

Early in 1905 an instructor in history at the University of Illinois made a trip to Belleville, Illinois, as the agent of the state historical library for the purpose of examining an old French document reputed to be in the courthouse at that place. In October, 1907, representatives of seven state historical agencies met in Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of effecting an organization for the promotion of western historical interests. The forces set in operation by these two events, working both independently and together, were destined to exert perhaps the most potent influences upon the development of historical activities pertaining to the Mississippi Valley from that time to the present.

Clarence Walworth Alvord, the instructor referred to, had been born in Massachusetts in 1868, the descendant of a long line of New England ancestors. He had been graduated from Williams College in 1891; had taught at Milton Academy two years; had studied history at Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin from 1893 to 1895 and at the University of Chicago a part of the following year; had taught history and mathematics in the preparatory school of the University of Illinois for four years; and had been promoted in 1901 to an instructorship in history in the university proper, where, in 1905, he was teaching European history, with the Italian Renaissance as his main interest. His selection for the Belleville expedition was probably due primarily to his knowledge of French institutions and especially of the French language, but his training under Professor Paul Scheffer-Boichorst in Berlin and his natural aptitude enabled him to make the most of the opportunity. He found not only the French document referred to but also a mass of Cahokia Manuscripts pertaining to the Virginia period of Illinois history. His report, issued as a bulletin by the state historical library in 1905, was a comprehensive and learned document. In it he recommended not only the publication of the Cahokia Manuscripts but also the formulation of a systematic plan for the "exhaustive publication of the material for the history of Illinois."

President Edmund J. James of the University of Illinois, who was also president of the board of trustees of the state historical library, realized that the situation offered great possibilities for scholarly and effective historical work and that the right man was at hand to develop it; and it was doubtless at his suggestion that the trustees asked Alvord to edit the material he had found. When it is considered that up to this time he had had no experience in editorial work and that his interest in and acquaintance with western history was of only a few months' standing, it is almost incredible that he was able in two years to transcribe, translate, edit, and put through the press The Cahokia Records, 1778-1790, a work that set a new standard for state historical editing and bookmaking in the West. Moreover, he included as the introduction to the volume a brilliant monograph of 143 pages on "The County of Illinois," which won his doctor's degree at the University of Illinois. This study was based not only upon the Cahokia Manuscripts and printed material but also upon the even more valuable Kaskaskia Manuscripts and Menard Papers, which Alvord had discovered during a second field trip in the summer of 1905. Much of his time during these years must also have been devoted to the working out, in conjunction with an advisory committee of professors of history from various institutions of the state, of detailed plans for several series of volumes of collections, each to include all the important inedited documents for a period or phase of the history of Illinois.

Having been appointed general editor of the Collections of the state historical library and relieved of part of his teaching duties at the university, Alvord proceeded to make arrangements with various scholars for editing volumes or series, joined with Professor Evarts B. Greene of the university in editing The Governors' Letter-Books, 1818-1834 (1910), and assembled and edited The Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790 (1910), consisting of material drawn from the Kaskaskia Manuscripts, the Menard Papers, the British Museum, the papers of the Continental Congress, the Draper Manuscripts of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the Canadian Archives, the Archiepiscopal Archives of Quebec, and other collections. Arrangements having been made

for the completion of this "Virginia Series" with a number of volumes of George Rogers Clark Papers, to be edited by Professor James A. James of Northwestern University, Alvord then turned his attention to the preceding period and assembled and edited, in conjunction with Professor Clarence E. Carter of Miami University, the documents for a "British Series" of the Collections. A total of fourteen volumes of Collections were brought out under Alvord's general editorship from 1907 to 1920 inclusive, an average of one a year. He was also special editor, either alone or in collaboration with another, of six of these volumes and of one published in 1921 after he had resigned the general editorship. In 1918 he submitted to the trustees of the library a "Memorandum on State Historical Work Relating to the Great War" that led to the establishment of a War Records Section of the library; and at the time of his resignation in 1920 he was engaged in editing the four-volume History of the 33rd Division, A.E.F., by Frederic L. Huidekoper, which was published by the library the following year under the editorial supervision of Alvord's successor.

In the meantime two other agencies had been created in Illinois for the promotion of historical work and in both of them Alvord was the guiding spirit. Plans were laid in the fall of 1909 that led ultimately to the establishment of the Illinois Historical Survey in the graduate school of the university, with Alvord in charge of the work. The present writer was research associate from 1910 to 1914 and a staff of assistants was built up. The purpose of the survey was to facilitate research and encourage the production of monographs in Illinois and western history, and especially to lay the foundations for the production of a scientific history of the state in connection with the centennial in 1918 of its admission to the Union. The work of the survey in compiling bibliographies; building up the university library; making surveys of archival and other manuscript materials throughout the country and abroad; assembling documents, transcripts, and photostats; compiling statistics; and promoting investigations cannot be described here. Suffice it to say that the activities of the survey together with the editorial work on the Illinois Historical Collections soon developed into a veritable laboratory of state history with Alvord as the directing head.

When the Illinois Centennial Commission was established in

1913, with the preparation and publication of a history of the state as one of its duties, Alvord was appointed editor-in-chief of the work. Plans were worked out for a five-volume comprehensive history and a preliminary volume on *Illinois in 1818*. The editor wisely decided to write the first volume of the general history, covering the period to 1818, himself, and the remaining volumes were assigned to other members of the university faculty. The collection of source materials for this history was carried on in a remarkably thorough and systematic manner, the resources of the survey and the state historical library being drawn upon for the purpose, as well as those of the centennial commission. An assistant was employed in Paris to make copies of a large number of unpublished documents in the French archives; transcripts of other documents from various European depositories were borrowed from the Library of Congress and reproduced; and newspaper files were borrowed from offices all over the state and abstracted. As a result of this extensive assembling of material, of the scholarly work of the authors, and especially of the competent editing, the Centennial History of Illinois (1918-20) was generally recognized as setting a new standard for state histories. Alvord's own volume, The Illinois Country, 1673-1818 (1920), is not only a masterly synthesis of the early history of the Middle West but also a demonstration that scientific history may be presented in an attractive literary form.

The activities that have been described, coupled with parttime teaching in the university, would seem to be sufficient fully
to absorb the energies of any man, but they constituted only a
part of Alvord's work and interests during these years. As early
as 1907, only two years after he turned his attention to American
history, he demonstrated the breadth of his interests and the
keenness of his scholarship by delivering an address before the
Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society on "The Genesis of
the Proclamation of 1763," which, in the words of Professor H.
E. Egerton "first gave a satisfactory interpretation of that
puzzling document." He followed this up the next year by a paper on "The British Ministry and the Treaty of Fort Stanwix,"
read before the State Historical Society of Wisconsin; and finally, in 1917, his studies in this field culminated in the publication
of a two-volume work entitled, The Mississippi Valley in Brit-

ish Politics, A Study of Trade, Land Speculation, and Experiments in Imperialism Culminating in the American Revolution. In writing this book Alvord made extensive use of transcripts from the Lansdowne (Shelburne) Papers and the Dartmouth Papers, then in England, and also of a multitude of rare English pamphlets of the period; and with this material he was able not only to fill a large gap in the history of the American West and make clearer the causes of the Revolution, but also to throw light upon some of the dark spots of English political history. The importance of this work and its reception by scholars are too well known to need much comment here. Professor Carl Becker characterized it as "an important contribution to the literature of the American Revolution," and Professor Egerton the English historian, wrote: "There are few readers on this side of the Atlantic who will not have much to learn from Mr. Alvord's learned and thoughtful volumes." In 1918 the first Loubat prize of one thousand dollars for the best work "on the history, geography, archaeology, ethnology, philology, or numismatics of North America . . . published in the English language for the five year period since January 1, 1913" was awarded to Alvord by the trustees of Columbia University for his Mississippi Valley in British Politics. It is not too much to say that after the appearance of this work he was generally recognized in England as one of the outstanding American historians.

Another line of interest developed by Alvord during these years was that of the earliest English explorations in the West, and in 1912 he published, in collaboration with Lee Bidgood, a volume entitled, The First Explorations of the Trans-Allegheny Region by the Virginians, 1650-1674. Nearly half of this book consists of a fascinating essay on "The Discovery of the Ohio Waters," and the remainder is devoted to original narratives of the explorations and other documents concerning them. The work served to impress upon students of history the fact that Englishmen were pushing across the mountains and into the great Mississippi Valley contemporaneously with the beginnings of French explorations of the interior. In November, 1914, Alvord delivered the "Albert Shaw Lectures in American Diplomatic History" at the Johns Hopkins University on "The Partition of the West in 1783"; and numerous addresses and periodical articles on a variety of subjects, private reprints of rare

documents, philosophical essays on "The Science of History" and "The New History," a report on the archives of Illinois, and reviews of books, especially in the *Nation*, also add to the variety and extent of his contributions during the period under consideration.

Reference was made at the beginning of this article to a meeting of representatives of historical agencies in October, 1907. At this meeting a decision was reached to organize a Mississippi Valley Historical Association, a tentative constitution was adopted, and provision was made for another meeting to complete the organization in Madison, Wisconsin, in connection with the December meeting of the American Historical Association. At this second meeting Clarence W. Alvord was much in evidence. The tentative constitution had declared the object of the association to be "to promote and popularize historical study and research." Alvord moved to strike out the words "and popularize" and the motion was adopted. He also served on a committee that was instrumental in changing another section of the constitution in such a way as to transform the proposed association from a confederation of historical agencies to a society of individuals "interested in the study of Mississippi Valley History." He was a member of the committee on nominations and was elected vice-president. At the first annual meeting of the association at Lake Minnetonka, in June, 1908, Alvord presided, in the absence of the president, gave a suggestive address on "The Study and Writing of History in the Mississippi Valley," proposed the publication of a "Mississippi Valley Historical Series," and was elected president for the ensuing year. At a meeting of the executive committee in December, 1908, he was made chairman of a committee of three on the publication of collections.

The project of publishing under the auspices of the association a series of volumes containing source material for the history of the Mississippi Valley was ardently cherished by Alvord. In 1909 a plan was agreed upon for creating a board of publication with one member from each state in the valley, to raise a publication fund to defray the cost of the first volume, with the expectation that the fund would be replenished by the proceeds of the sale of the volume. The next year, however, this plan was abandoned and a tentative contract was made with a publisher

to bring out the series, the association to furnish the copy and to receive a small share of the profits, should there be any. The task of supplying copy fell upon Alvord as chairman of the committee on publication, and he made plans for several volumes. Considerable work was done on one of these, a collection of reprints of rare pamphlets concerning proposed western colonies in the British period; but no money was available for editorial assistance, the work of volunteers was unsatisfactory, and finally the establishment of the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, followed by the wartime disturbance of financial conditions, caused the project to drop into the background. The copy that was prepared is still available, however, and it is to be hoped that sometime it may be completed and published.

The project for establishing a quarterly magazine under the auspices of the association was first broached by Alvord at the 1912 meeting and he was made chairman of a special committee to sound out the possibilities. A circular letter that he sent out to scholars interested in western history brought responses indicating that ample material of a high standard would be available for such a publication, a guarantee fund of approximately two thousand dollars a year for three years was obtained, and in 1913 the project was approved by the association and a board of editors was appointed with Alvord as managing editor. The first number of the Review appeared in June, 1914, and it quickly established itself as the most important periodical devoted wholly to American history. After three years of publication Dr. J. Franklin Jameson characterized it as "a well-planned, wellexecuted and interesting journal"; Mr. Lawrence J. Burpee, the distinguished Canadian historian, declared it might "fairly be said to rank with the half dozen really good reviews published on the North American continent"; Professor Charles M. Andrews of Yale characterized it as "dignified, scholarly, and among the best that we have"; and Professor Edward S. Corwin of Princeton declared it to be "indeed a publication of which too many kind things can hardly be said." For nine years, despite the pressure of other work, Alvord gave much of his time to the Review, without compensation, and when he turned it over to others it was a going concern with an assured future.

One of the reasons for Alvord's enthusiasm for the Mississippi Valley Historical Association was probably his hope that

it would promote two things in which he was greatly interested — the development of cooperation among historical agencies in the discovery, calendaring, reproduction, and publication of source material; and an improvement in the quality of the work done by such institutions, especially in the field of publication. He took an active interest in the Conference of Historical Societies, which meets annually under the auspices of the American Historical Association, and especially in its project for the coöperative calendaring of material for Mississippi Valley history in the French archives. He frequently participated in the discussions of the conference and in 1913 read a paper before it on "Planning the Publication Work of Historical Agencies." In this paper, after asserting that about half of the output of historical societies was almost worthless, he urged that plans be made for the systematic publication and scientific interpretation of the sources of information within the field of each institution, emphasized the necessity of having "a well-trained man in charge of the publishing activities," and deplored the tendency to sacrifice the highest standards of scholarship in the mistaken belief that such standards are not compatible with popularity.

Specific projects for cooperation or for reorganizing the work of agencies and especially for putting such work into the hands of trained men were always welcomed by Alvord with enthusiasm, and he was ever ready to lend his assistance. When in 1914 it appeared that the calendar of Mississippi Valley material in the French archives was approaching completion, he made arrangements for a dinner in connection with the American Historical Association meeting in Chicago to consider plans for the publication on a cooperative basis of a general collection of sources for the French period. He also joined with the present writer in arranging for another gathering in Chicago at this time, which led to the establishment in 1915 of the Conference of State Historical Agencies in the Upper-Mississippi Valley and to the cooperative calendaring of the material in the archives in Washington relating to the Northwest — a work that is still going forward. In January, 1915, he journeyed to St. Paul, to deliver the annual address before the Minnesota Historical Society on "The Relation of the State to Historical Work," and a few months later he spoke on the same subject in Indianapolis.

During these years of intense activity in research and editorial work Alvord continued to teach in the University of Illinois and he received his final promotion to a full professorship in 1913. Naturally his work was shifted to the field of American history and to advanced courses, but he had the reputation of being an exceptionally good teacher of undergraduates. To graduate students he gave both inspiration and rigorous training. The writer was never a student of Alvord's in the formal sense, but he can testify from experience to his interest in the work of others and his readiness to help with advice and encouragement. He was never too busy to rejoice over the discovery or achievement of a graduate student or fellow worker, and his enthusiasm was so contagious that a conference with him was a powerful stimulus to more and better work. Among the men who received much of their training under him are Professor Clarence E. Carter of Miami University, Professor Paul C. Phillips of the University of Montana, and Professor Wayne E. Stevens of Dartmouth College.

During his last few years in Illinois Alvord felt, and rightly, that the compensation he was receiving from the state was not commensurate with the amount and quality of the services he was rendering. His salary from the state historical library was fixed by law and the exigencies of politics made an increase impossible. The university was unwilling to make up the deficiency, since most of his time was given to the library; and, with the resignation of President James, who had taken a deep interest in his work, he felt that he could not count on the backing of the university authorities. Consequently he was ready to consider offers from other institutions and in 1920 he resigned his Illinois positions and accepted a professorship at the University of Minnesota.

Alvord's three years at Minnesota were happy ones. In addition to work with advanced students, he gave, for the first time in his career but with evident enjoyment, the first half of a general college course in American history. He continued to edit the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, completed the editing of a volume of *Illinois Historical Collections*, read a paper entitled "In re the American People vs. George III" at the

1921 meeting of the American Historical Association, served on the council of the Minnesota Historical Society and read papers at two of its meetings, and made plans for research and writing in various fields. Finally, having decided to write a work on the American Revolution with special reference to the West, — in a sense perhaps a continuation of his Mississippi Valley in British Politics, — and feeling that he must have access to essential material in foreign archives, in 1923 he resigned his position at Minnesota and his editorship of the Review and went to England.

The remaining years of his life were spent mostly in London, in Paris, and on the Italian Riviera, where he died, at Diano Marina on January 25, 1928. When he arrived in England he soon discovered that he had numerous friends there; many knew him only by reputation, others had corresponded with him, and some he had met in America. As a consequence he was soon drawn into many activities: he was an active member of the Anglo-American Historical Committee, prepared a paper for it on "Coöperation with Regard to Historical Periodicals," and contributed largely to the report of its subcommittee on the editing of modern manuscripts, of which he was a member; he was asked to give a course of lectures to the honor students at King's College of the University of London and a course of public lectures for the university; he served as chairman of the American Session of the Second Anglo-American Conference of Historians in 1926; and he was frequently called upon to help interpret America, past and present, to the English. He was tempted to try his hand at writing for the general reader and articles from his pen began to appear in the Contemporary Review, the Quarterly Review, the Nineteenth Century, and the Landmark, in England, and in the American Mercury. On October 28, 1925, he delivered the "Annual Raleigh Lecture on History" before the British Academy. Taking as his subject, "Lord Shelburne and the Founding of British-American Goodwill," he analyzed the motives and influences back of the peace negotiations at the end of the American Revolution with special reference to the matter of boundaries, and made an important contribution to the interpretation of the subject. The next year he was appointed Creighton

¹ This report, which ought to be better known to American editors, is published in the *Bulletin* of the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London, 3: 13-26 (July, 1925).

lecturer at the University of London, being the first American to be so honored, and the lecture, entitled "The Significance of the New Interpretation of Georgian Politics," was delivered on December 13 before a distinguished audience.

The numerous distractions and a number of periods of illness during these years abroad prevented Alvord from doing as much serious research and writing as he had hoped to do. Nevertheless he continued his studies along various lines, and in 1925 he began work on a series of chapters on the American Revolution and its causes for the first volume of the Cambridge History of the British Empire. These unfortunately were not completed when his last illness overtook him in the summer of 1927, but it is understood that one of them, entitled "Colonial Opposition, 1763-1770," will appear in the volume.

In estimating the work of Clarence W. Alvord as an historian it should be borne in mind that it was all done in the comparatively brief period of twenty-two years and the bulk of it in the fifteen years from 1905 to 1920. In this period, despite a prolonged illness during 1916 and 1917, he gave ample proof of exceptional competence in most of the varieties of historical endeavor. His ability to plan and organize work on a comprehensive scale is shown in the *Illinois Historical Collections* and the Centennial History, both in effect cooperative enterprises; his ability to assemble and edit documentary material is demonstrated in the volumes of the Collections for which he was personally responsible; his Mississippi Valley in British Politics is evidence that he could produce valuable monographic studies; and his *Illinois Country* demonstrated his powers of historical synthesis. His principal characteristics as an historian were imagination, thoroughness, the critical attitude, objectivity, and literary skill. His powers of imagination enabled him to formulate broad hypotheses, but he was always ready to modify them as his work progressed and he was never satisfied until he had seen the last bit of available evidence and had tested it all in the crucible of his keen mind. When the evidence was insufficient for positive statements he was content to point out the possible interpretations; and no prejudices or predilections of race, nationality, section, party, or religion modified his conclusions. He firmly believed that the results of historical scholarship could

and should be presented in good literary form, but he had no patience with mere popularization without real scholarship back of it. He was essentially a scholar, pursuing truth in history for the sake of knowing it and making it known to others, but with little interest in the practical utility of such knowledge.

Some indication of Alvord's reputation among English historians has already been given, and this may be supplemented by a few comments written at the time of his death. Thus Professor A. P. Newton expressed on behalf of the editors of the Cambridge History of the British Empire, their "regret that the untimely death of Professor Alvord should have deprived the world of scholarship of such a striking and outstanding figure. The loss to our own cooperative work is particularly severe for all that Prof. Alvord wrote was marked with an historic insight and a pungency of style that are quite unusual. . . . [His] life and work will long remain in the memories of English historians." Sir Israel Gollancz, secretary of the British Academy, declared that Alvord's "devotion to research and his whole-hearted endeavor to investigate the documentary evidence in respect of problems were object lessons in true scholarship," and referred to "the profound esteem" in which he "was held by the world of historical learning and scholarship." Lord Charnwood wrote that he "had a very high regard for Professor Alvord's work," and that "his services to important historical truth will be greatly missed."

Alvord's reputation among the members of his profession in America was handicapped by the fact that much of his work, and especially his earlier work, appeared to be in the field of state history. To many of the older generation of historians state history, except, of course, the early history of the original thirteen states, was provincialism. That attitude, fortunately, is passing away; and, as a matter of fact, most of Alvord's work transcended state lines and added materially to our knowledge of national history—if any distinction between the two is valid. There can be little doubt that future students of American historiography will rank Clarence W. Alvord as one of the outstanding American historians of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

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¹ The items in this bibliography are arranged chronologically, and an attempt has been made to include all published works except book reviews. Miss Mary E. Wheelhouse and Miss Alice Smith assisted in compiling the list.

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